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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
Dana P. Jacobson, Publisher/Managing Editor
Joseph Mirando, Managing Editor
Rob Mahlert, Associate Editor

Atari Online News, Etc. Staff

Dana P. Jacobson -- Editor
Joe Mirando -- "People Are Talking"
Michael Burkley -- "Unabashed Atariophile"
Albert Dayes -- "CC: Classic Chips"
Rob Mahlert -- Web site
Thomas J. Andrews -- "Keeper of the Flame"

With Contributions by:

Kevin Savetz

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->From the Editor’s Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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To say that this has been one of the worst spring seasons in memory is an understatement. Five - or has it been six - rainy weekends in a row now. This is Memorial Day weekend - the unofficial start of summer. It feels more like late-September. The temperatures have been 20 degrees colder than normal almost every day this month. I could certainly use some sun and warmth!! I guess my gardens will be going in a few weeks late this year!

Speaking of memories, I spent this past week reminiscing over stories of a few AtariFests of yesteryear. Yep, my favorite two shows of all time: WAACE and the New England AtariFest. Reading this week’s reports from the NEA ’90 show of almost 15 years ago, it seemed like the show occurred yesterday! What a bunch of terrific memories! I hope you enjoy the ride through memory lane as well. Meanwhile, I’ll be praying for the sun to appear during this long holiday weekend.

Until next time...

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Guidelines For Posting to comp.sys.atari.announce

comp.sys.atari.announce is a moderated newsgroup dedicated to news relevant to Atari computer users.

** Guidelines for posting to comp.sys.atari.announce **

comp.sys.atari.announce is a moderated newsgroup. In order to be approved, posts must offer news relevant to Atari computer users.

What kinds of posts will be approved?

* Relevant to Atari computers: 8-bit, ST/TT/Falcon, Portfolio, Atari’s PC clones, clones of Atari computers, or Atari computer emulators.
* Topics may include software, hardware, web sites and other Internet resources, events, emulators, and other news relevant to Atari users.
* Commercial posts and press releases are acceptable.

What kinds of posts will not be approved?
   * Any post that is not relevant to Atari computer users.
   * For sale posts are generally not approved unless they come
     from a developer or dealer that wishes to announce new pricing
     for product. Sale or auction announcements from end users will
     not be approved unless they are, for some reason, extraordinary.
   * Posts that are not informative.
   * Posts that are not in English.
   * Posts that aren't reasonably understandable (due to, for instance,
     significant grammar problems.)

How do I post a message?
   * Simply use your newsreader to post your message to
     comp.sys.atari.announce.
   * Alternatively, you may e-mail your post to c...@savetz.com
   * Please do not crosspost. You are welcome to post your announcement
     on other relevant newsgroups (for instance, comp.sys.atari.st
     or .8bit) but please do so as a separate posting.
   * Your post will be reviewed by the moderator, within a few days.
     If accepted, it will then be posted to the newsgroup. If it is
     rejected, you will receive an explanation via e-mail.

How do I follow up to announcements?
   * Followups to c.s.a.a announcements should be posted to
     a relevant Atari discussion group such as comp.sys.atari.8bit or
     comp.sys.atari.st. Follow-ups should not be posted to c.s.a.a.

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->A-ONE User Group Notes! - Meetings, Shows, and Info!
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Courtesy of STReport

 > NE AtariFest STR SHOW NEWS   New England Atari Fest Overviews...
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NEW ENGLAND ATARI FEST 1990
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by Ralph Mariano

The show was.... in so many words excellent! After arriving friday afternoon to what seemed to be "super frigid weather", I was met by Dana Jacobson at the arrivals gate. After waiting for the luggage, we retired to the lounge for a few moments to see if anyone else would show up. Dana gave me many 'sights' to behold on the way to his lovely home. Most of them translated into some of the reasons why I left the northeast 30 years

ago, almost all traffic related! Aside from the freezing cold, the traffic ate up close to an hour in getting from the airport to Dana's that's a trip that normally takes 10-15 minutes. After arriving at Dana's and getting settled in, we headed out to the show site to help set up the area. My immediate impression was extremely positive, "these folks really wanted to stage a super successful show".

The following morning came mighty fast, I was at the show site at 7:am helping with last minute preparations. It was, as always, quite a treat to see all the familiar faces from the past shows I've attended. The best part of all though, is meeting the new folks and those whom you have been "typing to" but had never met.

Once the doors opened to the public, the dam was broken. From about 15 minutes after the doors opened, it became very apparent that this one day show was on its way to a resounding success. Meeting the faces behind the names took on a whole new meaning when I finally met Bruno Puglia, Bruno is not at all like you would expect after reading the volume of posts he has sent in the ICD areas. Bruno has had his share of problems with hardware, but in reality, he knows what he is talking about. Between him and Joe Mardo they could very well solve many of the annoying problems found. It was indeed quite a sight to see Bruno in the ICD booth for a short while. The vendors and exhibitors, one and all, expressed that they were satisfied with their results at the show.

The STReport seminar produced a number of excellent questions from the users, the main theme of which embodied the basic apprehensiveness of the future. The single biggest point most all agreed upon is that Atari must advertise, Atari simply must let the whole country know they are here and in the computer business. The majority of the users expressed a strong desire to see Atari continue and do well despite the presence of its obvious ongoing problems. Since the departure of Elie Kenan, the stock has dipped below the 2 dollar mark and rose again to a little above two dollars. The latest revelation that G. Pratt has been appointed to take Kenan's place seems to be receiving mixed reviews and impressions. Time will tell.. this is the most optimistic and generally heard opinion.

Getting back to the show, I had the opportunity to meet Steve Rider, Bill Turner and Matt Singer of Forem BBS fame. We enjoyed a pleasant discussion about Atari, its future and a number of other interesting matters. The only downside to the show was the incidents involving Darlah's wallet disappearing the night before at dinner and the satchel full of hardware that grew legs on saturday morning.

I'll certainly be ready to fully support next year's New England Atari Fest. In fact, I'd be the first to recommend they go to a two day show. The level of enthusiasm and participation I witnessed gives every indication that a two day show would simply be outstanding. The attendance figures for a one day show were very impressive, the combined number (paid and non-paid) were well over 800. A two day show with a dinner, (maybe a dinner/dance? -hint-) on a saturday evening would do very nicely to round out a really good affair. What follows are a number of online posts concerning the show that were written by various attendees.

T.MCCOMB posts;

Well I just returned from the New England AtariFest '90!

I had a good time. It was a long drive up from Staten Island New York, but I had never been to Boston (or through Conn., RI & MA) so the drive was interesting.

This is the second Fest I have been to, I was at the Allentown one a few years ago. (all the others _always_ fall on a weekend that is/was committed to something else).

The turn out was pretty good for a show this size and everyone seemed pretty enthusiastic. It looked like sales were pretty brisk, so I think the dealers/devs that showed up weren't disappointed. I picked up a 2400 baud modem, 2 replacement mice, some blank disks, a copy of Clay's C-Manship book and some other sundry items that slip my mind.

The seminars were well attended, although I only had time for one, Nevin Shalit's Color PageStream/Tracker ST demo. The color output from PageStream was fantastic and Tracker ST is a well thought out, well executed program. If you are in need of something to maintain a mailing list/keep track of customers/do mail merges this baby will put a smile on your face. Apparently alot of people agreed, they were snatching them up at the show special price.

Got to finally see the Stacy (nice!), TT(great screen/colors/speed but that case just KILLS it) and the LYNX (I want one! Xmas is coming, if anyone needs my address to ship me one I will provide it, just ask).

I saw alot of people that I knew as a name before, like Bob Brodie, Darlah, Jim Allen, John Eidsvoog (sp?). It's always interesting to see the real face after creating an image of your own of how they "should" look! I didn't always introduce myself because I fear I may be a persona non grata around here since I am always "picking" on Corporate Atari and it's royal screw-ups (no matter how you sugar coat it, the ST debacle in the USA still stinks).

BTW this is the second time I've seen Darlah (I did introduce myself in Allentown) and I must say she is like a fine wine, definitely improving with time. Lookin' good Darlah!

Well that's about it, I'm pooped- got stuck in traffic at a construction project in Brooklyn for over an hour on the way home. ARRRGgghh.

(oh, one down side, apparently the personal hygiene of some Atari users leaves something to be desired- there were a few (more than a couple!) of real stinkers at the show! I suggest Atari come out with a water proof ST so some of these people visit a shower more often! Wow! Whew!)

Tom

D.JACOBSON2 posts;

Well everyone, I can finally say that I've rested up enough to relax

and reflect about the New England AtariFest ’90 show. As one of the organizers, and participants with my own user group, this show was simply fantastic. The participation by the vendors, developers, user groups, AND attendees was wonderful. I didn’t see one unhappy face or empty hands leaving the show. The vendors were happy with the turnout, and everyone did well. It was great to meet many people behind the names, here and on other services. A great time was had by all, and I just want to say thanks for all of your participation.

-Dana Jacobson

D.ANDERSON22 [Equinoxx] posts;

Tom:

The "name tag" thing was a definite oversight. It didn’t occur to me myself until just before the doors opened, even though I had seen the badges about two weeks before the show. If we do this again next year (and I know myself well enough to realize that, no matter how loudly I may proclaim NOW that I’m not going to get involved with another one of these, the second the planning starts, I’m going to jump right in...as Nevin said in his seminar, "I’m a masochist."), that’s one of the kinks I’ll personally see to working out. I do know that a few folks worked around this by just putting a business card in a badge holder...Ralph Mariano and Nathan Potechin come immediately to mind.

Finally, my own observations on the show. Although I didn’t have much of an opportunity to just walk around and enjoy the show as a spectator, I would be lying if I said I didn’t have a good time. Much of my time was spent making announcements of seminars, door prizes and the like (yes, that’s right, I was the official "Voice of New England AtariFest ’90"), although I did get a few chances to hobble about on what Mr. Mariano took to calling my "rubber crutches" (the sooner I can get rid of them, the happier I’ll be) to see what was what.

I was very pleased with the turnout, both from the standpoint of being one of the show’s organizers, and simply as an Atari enthusiast...it was just great to see that many people come out to support and see what was new with Atari. The factor of coming just three weeks after "The Big Show" down in DC didn’t seem to hurt our attendance, or theirs, by any noticeable degree. I’m told that the preliminary attendance figures hit the projection almost dead- on.

The exhibitors we talked with were happy...the people came, and they came to buy. One vendor told me they were "raking it in hand over fist". Several, like the WizWorks! contingent (Chet Walters, Dave Rudie & Dr. Bob...not to drop any names <grin>) said they look forward to coming back to Boston. We’ll definitely do our best to make it worth their while.

This is not to say that everything went as smoothly as we would have liked. Darlah, for example, was just not having a great day. The infamous Mr. Murphy decided he wanted to hang out with her, and it seemed like there was no good luck charm strong enough to ward him off. Somehow, though, she managed to keep smiling through it all. Nevin Shalit was having a slight problem with the Mega he was using in his seminar...some problem with memory (don’t anyone tell him it was MY machine, okay?). The

SyQuest Nathan Potechin brought over from Toronto with him came up blank when he tried to boot it, so he had to show Calamus and Outline RUNNING OFF OF FLOPPIES(!!), on top of which, halfway through his seminar, we were informed that there was a class scheduled in the room we were using (naturally, the University didn't think it was necessary to tell us about this when they gave us permission to use the room in the first place), so we had to move to an alcove just off the main show floor (we finally moved back to the room for Bob Brodie's talk).

On the other hand, there were great moments, too, like: seeing the TT (and John Eidsvoog's reaction when we finally came up with a monitor for it <grin>); Nathan Potechin's donation of a COMPLETE Calamus package (i.e., Calamus, Outline Art, the Font Editor and The Calamus Guide to Desktop Publishing -- over $700 worth of software!) as a door prize; watching Ralph Mariano help set up tables the night before the show; seeing Bruno Puglia hanging out with Cliff Terry in the ICD booth; dinner at Legal Seafood's Saturday night, where Chet Walters' son Chris ordered -- and GOT -- a pizza(!); just seeing the sheer numbers of people come streaming through the door; and, of course, Darlah's smile, in spite of her phenomenal run of bad luck (and I'm not going to be the one to tell you about it).

All in all, a positive experience. I want to go on record and thank EVERYONE who was involved with the show in any way...the folks who exhibited, those who gave seminars (and those who didn't get to, due to, shall we say, "Circumstances Beyond Our Control," Darlah? <grin>), the other organizers, the volunteers, the University of Massachusetts staff and campus police, the AMAZING staff of waiters and waitresses at Legal Seafoods, and especially, the good folks who lined up to buy tickets, and made the show such a success. Thanks, everyone. It meant a lot.

DARLAH [RT~SYSOP] posts;

I have to start off to say that this was a great show. I was impressed with everyone that was involved that I dealt with. When you say bad luck, I had it royally. I think it is finally hitting me. <smile> Yeah I am still smiling but that is thanks to all those that cared. It meant the world. I had my wallet stolen the 1st night in town then the second day my hard drives and my keyboard vanished. Yes folks, I forgot about the keyboard. <sigh>

I was faced with going home and not being able to work. Thanks to Jim Allen for making calls and most of all Mr. Champagne for allowing me to take his keyboard and mouse home till I get one fedexed to me out tomorrow. The generosity, I can't believe it and it warms my heart. I mean that sincerely. For all those that tried to find out where the HDS went to to taking me to the police station to just listening and lending me their equipment, what can I say but my deepest thanks go out to you.

For those that said nice things about me an my appearance, what you have done to my ego. I needed that tonight. :-) I felt like I looked a mess. I sure felt it.

I did get around and look at some of the booths. Joppa was so packed you couldn't even get near the booth. The show was busy all the way till the end. I was impressed with the way the show came off. The appearance of

the booths, the friendly atmosphere (minus the person who has my equipment of course. :-) > I enjoyed talking to everyone that stopped by and said hello. Till tomorrow.....I am off to rest and regroup. Again, thanks. Great show! Great people!

PS: Can I please have an address to ship the keyboard back to? I also would like to have an address for each and every person that helped me out. Please appease me and send me it in mail. Thanks!! Oh that is GEnie mail of course. Night all. :-)

ISD [Nathan] posts;

Allow me to also take this opportunity to say thanks. I enjoyed myself, it was a great show, attendance was good and the atmosphere was very positive. I listened to Bob's seminar without nodding off more than once or twice :-), wiped out my files, commiserated with Darlah on the loss of her wallet and harddrives ate at a few excellent restaurants, enjoyed seeing David Anderson again hobbling around and actually pronouncing my name correctly over the P.A. (thanks David) :-) and have just now arrived back home. We'll have to do this again sometime. My thanks to all of the organizers and volunteers for a great show.

D.JACOBSON2 posts;

It's nice to hear that everyone enjoyed the show. All I can do is echo Dave's comments earlier - I couldn't say it any better. It was a very enjoyable weekend, from the standpoint of being one of the organizers, user group participants, and as a "customer". I had the best of all three worlds!! It was great meeting everyone that I missed meeting at WAACE. Everyone was great to talk with, and that included the party at Legal Seafood afterward (Darlah, where were you??). Looking forward to next year for an even better show!!

-Dana

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING

compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Well, last week's enforced absence bothered me a little bit. No, I wasn't sick or anything like that. The UseNet server that I normally use to gather the posts for this column was down. Imagine that... a big company like SBC having something as important (well, important to SOME of it's subscribers) as a news server down for almost an entire day?

Anyway, the server is back up and running, and I've been monitoring it and grabbing messages here and there so that if it DID go back down, I'd have SOMETHING to put in a column this week.

Y'know, it's funny how things happen sometimes. For instance, having this little story to relate to you has kept me from venting about the male bovine refuse going on in the government right now. I won't burden you with my opinions, since I don't have room for them since I explained why there was no column last week. See how things work out? <grin>

Anyway, let's get on with the news, hints, tips and info from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup

'Kevin' asks...

"What is the simplest and least expensive way to upgrade a 520? Anyone know where can find some detailed info regarding doing a 1 meg or more upgrade? Is the tweety board upgrade worth it? Any way I can network a pc to this machine or a cheap way to add a hard drive?"

'Chis' tells Kevin:

"I've got about 3 STFM's with 1 MB and 1.44 floppy for sale, though unless your in the UK you won't want to pay the postal costs!"

Kevin replies:

"Damn Chris!!! You got my hopes up for a minute there! Here in the US it is hard to find anything but 520's everything else (including upgrades/peripherals) seem to be terribly over priced. Then again I have just started looking."

Chris tells Kevin:

"You're not the only one who said that too, a few people around the world are interested in such machines, but postage from the UK costs more than the machine is worth. The only solution (if you cant find one) is I could sort out a 1MB motherboard for you and possibly just post that to you, though its still going to work out a fair bit to do that, though not as much as shipping the entire ST!"

Mike Freeman asks about a mouse-click delay in MagiC:

"When I switched from Geneva to Magic 6.01 a few years back, I noticed that Magic had a bit of a delay between the time you press the mouse button and the time the system acts on that click. It's somewhere between 1/4 and 1/2 a second. I thought it was just something to do with the speed of my system. But now I have a CT60, and the delay is still there. Does anyone know what causes this, and if there is a fix?

An example of this can be seen when I try to highlight text in Papyrus. I have to click, hold the mouse still for a bit, then move it. Otherwise, if I click and immediately move the mouse, the first part of the text that I move past doesn't get highlighted. Another example is when playing one of the Minesweeper games. If I quickly click on a bunch of spaces without stopping for a bit over each one, they either don't get marked, or the wrong ones get marked.

So, does anyone have any clues to what's going on? I've tried changing my Timeslice and Priority settings, with no effect. I have my mouse double-click speed set at nearly the fastest speed. I'm not sure what else to check, or if there's even anything to do about it, other than switch to Mint (which I won't do until there's a good enough GUI on it that can compete with Magic's)."

Alexander Beuscher tells Mike:

"Sorry, I never did experience such a kind of delay on any Atari system.

Did you check with a raw MagiC-Setup (i.e. no additional AUTO folder programs, no accessories) as well?

The fact that this does not happen with TOS or Geneva running indicates that your hardware is ok."

Mike tells Alexander:

"Yes, the same occurs with a "raw" Magic setup."

Alexander bounces one more idea off of Mike:

"Do you have another Atari to install your MagiC 6.01 on? Or do you have different Versions of MagiC to check the mouse behaviour with them? You see, I am running out of ideas!"

Ronald Hall asks about IRC channels to try:

"Guys, what's the best Atari IRC channels to hit?
I tried IRCnet (Stealth?) last night but never could get on.
I tried /join #AtariScn from some other ones but never could get through.

PS This was with Xchat from my Linux box."

Janez Valant tells Ronald:

"U better try #atariscne"

Lonny Pursell adds:

"Also try us.ircnet.org or irc1.us.ircnet.org if stealth doesn't seem to work."

Ronald tells Lonny and Janez:

"Well, I've just about given up on chatting with fellow Atarians live on IRC... :-(

I have a Dlink hardware router/firewall, as well as running shorewall (software firewall) on my Linux box. To rule out why I can't connect, I completely turned off the software firewall and opened up my comps IP address as a DMZ. (I would never do this if it was a Windoze box!). :-)

BUT...I still can't connect to stealth. Here is the output from Xchat:

```
--- Looking up irc.stealth.net..
--- Connecting to open.pl.ircnet.net (82.146.235.2) port 5550..
--- Connection failed. Error: Connection refused
 Cycling to next server in IRCNet...
--- Disconnected ().
```

and then it goes through this seemingly endless cycle where it tries different servers - all with the same results. I let it run for about an hour. :-(

Anyone have any ideas?"

Neil Chester asks for help with HighWire:

"I have found that I have mistakenly deleted the "module:" entry on the "about" dialog box on the newest version of Highwire - with no obvious sign of getting it back again!

All the Modules remain in the Module folder but Highwire does not seem to want to load the Network.Ovl even after a reset! Also I have retrieved a fresh copy of Highwire.app from the distribution archive but even this reports "modules: (none)" now.

How do you get the online modules back?

The Config file doesn't have any options for the Module so where does it get configured from?

Also the Iconnect Ovl doesn't work with the latest version of Highwire, any answers on this?"

kiselo zelje tells Neil:

"well, install it again afresh if nothing else helps.

I also noticed that iconnect module works a bit unstable...could be the changes to the program since the module seems the same to me ..."

'ProToS' adds:

"I use it every day with no problem under Magicmac.

I also have in the past several crash with Highwire+Iconnect (and with all the sites) and I found that this couple was hyper

sensitive to the adjustment of the MTU.
That even made me crash MacOS too .....

Then tests other values of MTU in Iconf.prg, default value must be on 512, in my conf I spent 1492 for MTU value and that made an end to my superb crash of highwire."

Derryck Croker asks ProToS:

"Do you use a dial-up connection or cable/ADSL? "

ProToS replies:

"ADSL. You need macstip to use it but it seems to be hard to find this macos soft now."

Jean-Luc Ceccoli adds:

"As far as I know, MTU must be of 1492 with aDSL, and 1500 if pure ethernet (or cable). That isn’t the only value that can affect the traffic..."

Hallvard Tangeraas asks about loading TOS 1.62 from a file:

"Is there a way I can make my Mega STe (TOS 2.06) load TOS 1.62 from file (or other, older than 2.06 versions)? "SelTOS" doesn’t work with TOS 1.62 image files."

’Phantom’ tells Hallvard:

"I don’t know if this will work on a TOS 2.06 MSTE, but on my 1040STE with TOS 1.62 I use to load up older versions of TOS simply by putting the TOS disk in the drive and cold boot.

This worked on the old Disk version of TOS.
I have a MSTE with Tos 2.06 as well. If this works or you find a way to do it, let me know. I’d really like a few TOS switchers for a 1040STE and a MegaSTE."

Hallvard replies:

"All I have is the ROM image file of TOS 1.62 (actually completely legal as well since I also own an STe with TOS 1.62!), so I don’t know how I should create a TOS boot disk without some sort of loader program."

Phantom tells Hallvard:

"I’m not sure what a TOS Image file actually is.

Is it a copy of the TOS chips placed into some type of single file?

Not sure if this will help, but remember Falcon TOS 4.92?

It was on a Disk and you simply put the disk in the Falcon
and it loaded upon Boot up.
There was talk about burning it into a ROM chip.
Someone may have done it.

If you have a Single File, if there is some way to break it down into
readable files on the STe then you would be close.

AFAIK, all ST-Falcons look at the disk drive first to see if there is
a bootable file. If there is, then it is ran. I believe that is
correct.

There must be some way to do this.
IINM, there is a program that will convert them to disk.
But my memory on this subject has faded a bit.
If I come up with something, I'll let ya know.

If I remember correctly. There is a PC program that uses
these TOS Images with a program to run ST software on PCs.
Personally, I didn't like the idea of using TOS Images on PCs,
and I still don't. But that's my opinion.

What is the Tos 1.62 filename and extender?
I'll try to dig up something if no one else has the answer.

Also could you provide the URL for the Images?
I'd like to get those myself. I have 8 Ataris not counting 8-bits.
I've got it bookmarked somewhere on one of my Falcons.
But, there are probably a thousand URLs. (Need to clean them out)

If you don't want to post it, then e-mail it if ya don't mind."

Hallvard tells Phantom:

"I found a few "Disk-TOS" files, which is probably what I need:
http://home.ptd.net/~cjhafner/
I'll try them out when I get the time.

You were asking about TOS image files yourself -take a look at the above
website ;-)

By the way, does anyone know about the legal situation for TOS at the
moment? I don't support piracy, but since the Atari ST is no longer
sold, and neither is TOS, I can't see who's going to suffer from people
putting up TOS image files on websites for other people to download."

Well folks, that's it for this week. Tune in again next time, same time,
same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

AAA Members Can Look for Cheap Gasoline On the Web

U.S. drivers will have another tool available in their pursuit of low-priced gasoline this Memorial Day weekend when AAA members on Thursday gain access via AAA club Web sites to retail prices at individual service stations.

Just ahead of the Memorial Day holiday weekend, the traditional kickoff of the U.S. summer driving demand season, and with gasoline prices above $2.00 a gallon, AAA members will be able to research gasoline prices at individual service stations anywhere in the United States.

The AAA Fuel Price Finder tracks the gasoline price charged through credit card transactions at the individual stations rather than relying on volunteer price spotters.

Data from 85,000 stations throughout the United States can be accessed detailing prices at stations in a three-, five-, or 10-mile radius of any zip code. Results are provided in a map of the area with stations listed with their fuel prices, street address and whether or not diesel fuel is available.

More than 20 individual AAA club Web sites, from the populous Northeast United States to California on the West Coast, will offer links to the price finder.

The Web tool is an extension of the data AAA uses to calculate U.S. average retail gasoline and diesel fuel prices. On Tuesday, the average retail price stood at $2.114 a gallon, with diesel at $2.258 a gallon.

The record prices recorded by AAA were recorded on April 11, when the average gasoline price hit $2.276 and diesel hit $2.388 a gallon.

EU Sees Deal With Microsoft in May

Microsoft Corp. made a deal with the European Commission to resolve their differences over remedies imposed on the software giant for violating antitrust laws before the end of May, the EU's competition chief said on Monday.

"We made a deal that before the end of the month we would reach an agreement. We are waiting for the Microsoft people to do their homework," European Competition Commissioner Neelie Kroes told Reuters. Asked whether she would open a new process against Microsoft if it failed to act, Kroes said: "It is too premature to say that." The Commission could fine Microsoft up to $5 million daily for failure to comply with sanctions imposed on it.

The Commission, which polices competition in the 25-nation European Union, fined the U.S. software giant a record 497 million euro ($654.9 million) on March 24, 2004, and ordered it to change the way it does business.

"We continue to work hard with the commission to reach an agreement on full compliance with the decision," a spokesman for Microsoft in Brussels said when told of Kroes' remarks.

The decision required Microsoft to make its ubiquitous Windows operating system available without Windows Media Player, so computer makers could buy alternative software, to play films and music, from RealNetworks and Apple.

It also ordered the company to share information with rival makers of servers used to run printers and retrieve files, an issue known as interoperability. The company was supposed to propose a trustee to monitor its compliance.

If the deal with Kroes falls through, the Commission could decide that Microsoft has taken enough time to comply with the decision and open a new procedure against the firm to fine it for non-compliance.

That would require a formal statement of objections, an advisory committee of EU states and, finally, a decision by the full 25-member European Commission.

But such a procedure could move very quickly, because there is very little that needs proving - Microsoft so far has not met requirements that it comply with the remedies to the satisfaction of the Commission.

If the Commission moved quickly, it could complete work before its summer recess at the end of July.

Internet Explorer Has Issue with Netscape

Efforts to revive the Netscape browser hit another stumbling block with the discovery that the latest iteration of the Web browser can wreak havoc with Internet Explorer, although Netscape developer AOL has downplayed the problem.

A Microsoft blog entry by IE program manager Dave Massy reports that the installation of Netscape 8 incapacitates the XML rendering capabilities of Explorer. As a result, users who navigate the Web in IE to an XML file, such as an RSS feed, will get a blank page.

Microsoft advised IE users to uninstall Netscape 8 from their machines, and said the company is working with Netscape to provide a solution to the issue.

"This is a minor issue that won't affect most users," said AOL spokesperson Andrew Weinstein. "It only impacts the ability to render XML code, so the primary effect is on programmers working in that code."

AOL is addressing the problem, Weinstein said, and expects to deliver a fix through an automatic update next week. "There are no security issues associated with this problem," he said.

Since its introduction, this is the second problem to emerge for Netscape

8, which is based on the open-source Firefox browser but also offers support for IE.

Hours after the official launch, AOL released a security update to fix more than 40 security vulnerabilities.

The vulnerabilities included a flaw in how the browser handled GIF images, which could have allowed an attacker to execute code remotely on a user's system.

The security update is included in the release of Netscape 8.0.1, and also includes the security fixes made to the Firefox browser in March.

Version 8 is the browser's first major upgrade in three years, and was touted by AOL as having several strong security features specifically designed to protect users against remote attacks.

U.S. House Votes To Outlaw Computer Spyware

The U.S. House of Representatives on Monday voted to establish new penalties for purveyors of Internet "spyware" that disables users' computers and secretly monitors their activities.

By overwhelming majorities, the House passed two bills that stiffen jail sentences and establish multimillion-dollar fines for those who use secret surveillance programs to steal credit-card numbers, sell software or commit other crimes.

Spyware has emerged as a major headache for computer users over the last several years.

It can sap computing power, crash machines and bury users under a blizzard of unwanted ads. Scam artists use spyware to capture passwords, account numbers and other sensitive data.

Spyware can end up on users' computers through a virus or when they download games or other free programs off the Internet.

"Consumers have a right to know and have a right to decide who has access to their highly personal information that spyware can collect," said California Republican Rep. Mary Bono (news, bio, voting record), who sponsored one of the bills.

The bills prohibit a number of practices often associated with spyware, such as reprograming the start page on a user's Web browser, logging keystrokes to capture passwords and other sensitive data, or launching pop-up ads that can't be closed without shutting down the computer.

The practice known as "phishing" - in which scam artists pose as banks or other businesses in an attempt to trick consumers into divulging account information - would also be outlawed.

The House voted 395 to 1 to impose jail sentences of up to 2 years. Violators could face fines up to $3 million per incident. Those who use spyware to commit other crimes, such as identity theft, could have an additional 5 years tacked on to their sentences.

Both bills passed the House last year but the Senate adjourned before taking action. Similar legislation has been introduced in the Senate this year.

Most spyware practices are already illegal under deceptive-business laws but federal and state law enforcers have only sued two spyware purveyors so far, one expert said.

"We know that there are literally hundreds of these cases out there. Unless there's a push for enforcement, passing a new law is really only going to help after the fact," said Ari Schwartz, associate director at the Center for Democracy and Technology, a consumer-advocacy group.

The bill gives the Justice Department an additional $10 million per year through 2009 to fight spyware.

Hackers Holding Computer Files 'Hostage'

The latest threat to computer users doesn't destroy data or steal passwords - it locks up a person's electronic documents, effectively holding them hostage, and demands $200 over the Internet to get them back.

Security researchers at San Diego-based Websense Inc. uncovered the unusual extortion plot when a corporate customer they would not identify fell victim to the infection, which encrypted files that included documents, photographs and spreadsheets.

A ransom note left behind included an e-mail address, and the attacker using the address later demanded $200 for the digital keys to unlock the files.

"This is equivalent to someone coming into your home, putting your valuables in a safe and not telling you the combination," said Oliver Friedrichs, a security manager for Symantec Corp. The company said Tuesday the problem was serious but not deemed a high-level threat because there were no indications it was widespread.

The FBI said the scheme was unlike other Internet extortion crimes. Leading security and antivirus firms this week were updating protective software for companies and consumers to guard against this type of attack, which experts dubbed "ransom-ware."

"This seems fully malicious," said Joe Stewart, a researcher at Chicago-based Lurhq Corp. who studied the attack software. Stewart managed to unlock the infected computer files without paying the extortion, but he worries that improved versions might be more difficult to overcome. Internet attacks commonly become more effective as they evolve over time and hackers learn to avoid the mistakes of earlier infections.

"You would have to pay the guy, or law enforcement would have to get his key to unencrypt the files," Stewart said.

The latest danger adds to the risks facing beleaguered Internet users, who must increasingly deal with categories of threats that include spyware, viruses, worms, phishing e-mail fraud and denial of service attacks.

In the recent case, computer users could be infected by viewing a

vandalized Web site with vulnerable Internet browser software. The infection locked up at least 15 types of data files and left behind a note with instructions to send e-mail to a particular address to purchase unlocking keys. In an e-mail reply, the hacker demanded $200 be wired to an Internet banking account. "I send programm to your email," the hacker wrote.

There was no reply to e-mails sent to that address Monday by The Associated Press.

Ed Stroz, a former FBI agent who now investigates computer crimes for corporations, said the relatively cheap ransom demand - only $200 - probably was deliberately low to encourage victims to pay rather than call police and to discourage law enforcement from assigning these cases a high priority.

"That’s a very powerful threat," Stroz said. "If somebody encrypted your files, you need this stuff now to do your work."

FBI spokesman Paul Bresson said more familiar Internet extortion schemes involve hackers demanding tens of thousands of dollars and threatening to attack commercial Web sites, interfering with sales or stealing customer data.

Experts said the Web site where the infection originally spread had already been shut down. They also said the hacker’s demand for payment might be his weakness, since bank transactions can be traced easily.

"The problem is getting away with it - you’ve got to send the money somewhere," Stewart said. "If it involves some sort of monetary transaction, it’s far easier to trace than an e-mail account."

U.S. FTC Asks For Help Against Spam ’Zombies’

Home computer users who unwittingly send out spam e-mail should be disconnected from the Internet until their machines are fixed, the U.S. Federal Trade Commission said on Tuesday.

The FTC said it would ask 3,000 Internet providers around the globe to make sure that their customers’ computers haven’t been hijacked by spammers who want to cover their tracks and pass bandwidth costs on to others.

Online viruses like "SoBig" turn infected computers into spam-spewing "zombies" that send out millions of unwanted messages without the owner’s knowledge. Zombie networks are responsible for 50 percent to 80 percent of all spam, according to various estimates.

Because many home users lack the technical smarts to fight the problem on their own, the FTC hopes their Internet providers will help, although they are not required to do so.

Internet providers should identify computers on their networks that are sending out large amounts of e-mail and quarantine them if they are found to be zombies, the FTC said. They should also help customers clean their machines and tell them how to keep them safe in the first place, the FTC said.

The FTC said Internet providers should route all customer e-mail through their own servers, which could upset more technically proficient users who run their own e-mail servers.

The FTC also said it plans to identify specific zombie computers and notify their Internet providers.

Law enforcers in 25 other countries, from Bulgaria to Peru, are also participating in the campaign, the FTC said.

Absent from the list of cooperating countries was China, where experts say rapid growth and a relative lack of technical sophistication have led to a large number of zombie computers.

Most U.S. Internet providers already have taken the steps outlined in the FTC's letter but they must take care not to squelch legitimate mail in the process, said Dave McClure, president of the U.S. Internet Industry Association.

"It's sometimes very difficult to tell the difference between spam coming across your network and your local charitable organization sending out its monthly newsletter," said McClure, who added that U.S. law prevents Internet providers from reading customer e-mail.

The FTC's campaign follows on earlier efforts to shut down "open relays" and other poorly configured computers that have been exploited by spammers.

Fret About PC Zombie Threat?

Worried about zombies? Internet users concerned about the number of virus-infected PCs ready to launch an attack over the Web can at least keep track of how afraid they should be - and satisfy their curiosity - by visiting CipherTrust Inc.'s new ZombieMeter resource.

The security company added the ZombieMeter to its Web site this week, offering visitors hourly information on the global activity of new zombies by tracking data it receives through its IronMail e-mail security appliances.

Zombiesare Internet-connected computers that have been infected by malicious code that allows hackers to control them remotely. They are often used to launch denial-of service (DoS) attacks or send unwanted e-mail.

Although CipherTrust only monitors zombie activities based on data from its network of e-mail appliances, it counted an average of 172,009 new zombies a day for the first three weeks in May. Of these, 20 percent are in the U.S. and 15 percent in China. That represents a slight shift from late March and early April, when around 20 percent of the 157,000 new zombies it identified on average each day were in China.

The European Union, meanwhile, was a virtual hothouse for zombies, with 26 percent of new infected machines in its member states during the first three weeks of May, CipherTrust said. Six percent of these were in Germany, 5 percent in France and 3 percent in the United Kingdom, the company said.

South Korea is also a popular zombie haunt: 10 percent of new infected machines in the first few weeks of May were in that country, CipherTrust

said.

While the Alpharetta, Georgia, security company said tracking zombies helps it to identify behavioral patterns and predict threats, it was unclear how the information might aid the average Internet user.

"I suppose it might increase your paranoia as a home user, or convince you to update your antivirus software," said one London-based IT manager.

Microsoft Takes on Spam with New Hotmail Tools

Microsoft on Thursday announced new MSN Hotmail tools and services designed to expand e-mail industry collaboration in fighting spam - MSN Postmaster and Smart Network Data Services.

These new services are designed to complement ongoing industry efforts supported by Microsoft - including e-mail-authentication mechanisms such as the Sender ID Framework - to help protect MSN Hotmail customers as well as the overall e-mail community from online safety concerns such as spam, phishing and viruses.

Central to the effort by MSN Hotmail to engage with the e-mail community is the launch of the new MSN Postmaster Web site, an online resource available in 10 languages. It is designed to help bulk e-mailers, ISPs, e-mail service providers and others better understand issues around sending e-mail to users of the MSN Hotmail Web-based e-mail service.

MSN Postmaster offers up-to-date information and tools that address a range of issues, including how to fight junk e-mail, improve delivery of legitimate bulk e-mail messages and streamline the reporting of e-mail abuse.

As part of MSN Postmaster, Microsoft also introduced a preview release of the company’s Smart Network Data Services. Microsoft hopes that with the new service, ISPs will be able to contribute to the fight against spam and protect e-mail more effectively.

Smart Network Data Services reports on several characteristics of e-mail traffic sent to MSN Hotmail. For instance, an ISP can find out the volume of e-mail being sent from its IP space to MSN Hotmail, how that e-mail is impacted by MSN Hotmail spam filtering and what percentage of its e-mail has been marked as spam by MSN Hotmail and MSN customers.

ISPs in turn can take appropriate action, such as identifying and cleaning compromised machines, increasing the security measures for the host or network, or working with the party that sent the messages to determine if it is spam or legitimate e-mail.

"With over 200 million active e-mail accounts worldwide, MSN Hotmail is in a unique position to collect and analyze e-mail activity data," said Kevin Doerr, product unit manager for MSN Hotmail at Microsoft. "Working together, MSN Hotmail and service providers can make their customers happier and more satisfied with the services we all provide."

In January, MSN Hotmail implemented Sender ID, an e-mail-authentication protocol championed by Microsoft and other industry players. Sender ID is designed to help address the problem of domain spoofing.

If an e-mail message comes in that appears to be a phishing attempt, it will not be delivered to consumers' inboxes, but instead will be sent to their junk e-mail folders; MSN Hotmail will notify the customers that the "phishy" URL has been disabled to help protect them.

Microsoft continues to invest in Sender ID, and MSN in the coming months will make Sender ID "warning alert" notifications visible via a new safety bar in the MSN Hotmail user interface. The safety bar has been designed to alert customers to potential issues with received e-mail by displaying phrases such as "The sender of this message could not be verified by Sender ID."

The alerts will provide customers with options to learn more about Sender ID with a single mouse click, as well as provide guidance on staying safe online.

For organizations looking to implement Sender ID themselves, Microsoft will be cohosting the E-Mail Authentication Implementation Summit 2005 on July 12 with three dozen other industry players to help provide information and best-practice recommendations for implementing e-mail authentication mechanisms such as Sender ID.

Nokia Unveils Handheld Internet Tablet

Nokia Corp. is introducing a handheld tablet for Web-browsing over a wireless broadband connection, the company's first non-phone mobile device and the latest in a long line of attempts to create a so-called "Internet appliance" for quick online access around the home.

The new Internet Tablet, unveiled Wednesday and slated to go on sale this summer, is based on the open-source Linux operating system rather than the Symbian platform Nokia uses for "smart" cell phones.

Priced at $350, the Internet Tablet is being positioned as an alternative to buying an extra personal computer or laptop for different rooms, providing a cheaper, quicker and less-cumbersome way to connect to the Web and e-mail at home.

There's no hard drive but rather 128 megabytes of onboard flash memory and a memory card slot. Nokia says the device is not intended as a rival to Apple Computer Inc.'s iPod or other MP3 music players. A software update is expected early next year to add features such as voice-over-Internet telephony and instant messaging.

While fairly unique in terms of its handheld size, the Internet Tablet can be seen as another variation on a concept that has repeatedly failed to catch on - a device that offers easy Internet access and basic tasks such as e-mail for which the computing power of a full-blown PC is unnecessary.

During the Internet bubble, prominent names from a wide range of technology industries dabbled with Web appliances. Intel Corp., Gateway Inc., 3Com Corp., America Online, National Semiconductor Corp. and Honeywell all either launched or promised such devices. Nokia itself weighed in with a tablet called the MediaScreen.

Many were wired devices, such as the "Audrey" from 3Com, though a few like

the Airboard from Sony Corp. and the WebPAD developed by National Semi used wireless technologies similar to Wi-Fi.

Since the Nokia tablet is meant to be carried from room to room, its 4.1-inch screen is considerably smaller than the display on most of these predecessor appliances but also far bigger and sharper compared with most cell phones and handheld computers.

And rather than serving up stripped-down versions of Web pages like most mobile devices, the tablet uses an Opera browser to display sites as they'd appear on any computer.

Weighing half a pound, the Internet Tablet is three-quarters of an inch thick, 5.6 inches wide and 3.1 inches deep. It includes a loudspeaker but there's no typewriter keyboard for thumb-typing e-mail as on popular handheld computers such as the Treo and BlackBerry. Instead, the tablet comes with a stylus to tap a virtual keyboard on the screen.

The device is designed primarily to use at home, though its Wi-Fi transmitter can also connect with public and commercial hot spots. There's also a USB port to connect with a PC and a Bluetooth transmitter that can be used to connect with a mobile phone that has cellular online access.

The Nokia announcement marks the second time in days that a prominent producer of mobile devices has veered into a new product category.

Last week, PalmOne. Inc. unveiled a $500 device called the LifeDrive, essentially a cross between a mobile media player, portable hard drive and an organizer. The LifeDrive features 4 gigabytes of internal storage and a high-resolution screen for on-the-road access to music, video, digital photos, e-mail and office documents. It also offers Wi-Fi wireless capability to connect with the Web and corporate networks remotely.

But no matter how well the new Nokia and Palm devices may be designed, new product concepts founder more often than not.

Nokia in particular has struggled in its attempts to forge several new product categories. Most prominent among these has been the N-Gage, a cell phone designed specifically for video games. Others include a digital picture frame with a cellular connection to download photos.

Sales of the N-Gage, shaped more like a portable game player than a phone, have been weak since it was first introduced in late 2003. But Nokia has stood by the concept, introducing updated versions of the device and maintaining an "N-Gage Arena" wireless community for multiplayer games and forums.

Intel Launches Dual-Core Chips for PCs

Intel Corp. unveiled its first mainstream home PC microprocessor with two computing engines on a single chip Thursday and vowed to sell millions of them by the end of the year.

The Pentium D processor and supporting chips will target home computer users, particularly those who run more than one program at once or have software that is designed to take advantage of the extra computing horsepower of the chips' dual cores.

"We’re shipping 100,000 this quarter, and we’re going to ship millions by the end of the year," said Gerald Holzhammer, vice president of Intel’s Digital Home Group. "This is a big deal for us. It’s the first time dual core will make a real impact on the marketplace."

Intel also is hoping to persuade PC makers to include other technologies that make up the chip maker’s "digital home" platform, including a chipset that improves graphics, sound, storage and security capabilities.

It’s part of Intel’s recent strategy to supply more than just microprocessors to computer markers. The move started in 2003, when Intel launched its Centrino technology that includes a processor, chipset and wireless radio tuned to work together in notebook computers.

The home desktop platform has not received a brand name, though executives said the matter was under consideration.

The Pentium D is not Intel’s first dual-core chip. Earlier this month, Intel started shipping its Extreme Edition Pentium for PC enthusiasts and gamers. But its steep price tag - as high as $1,000 per chip - has kept it from the reach of most home users.

When purchased in volume, Pentium D prices range from $241 to $530 with speeds from 2.8 gigahertz to 3.2 GHz. Supporting chipsets range from $38 to $42.

Also Thursday, Intel announced the launch of a business desktop platform that features a greater maximum memory, remote management tools and security features. In its current form, the business platform doesn’t include dual-core chips.

Next month, Intel rival Advanced Micro Devices Inc. is expected to launch its first dual-core chips for mainstream desktop computers. AMD has already launched a dual-core chip for servers.

Internet Radio Is Gaining, But Problems Remain

Like a sleeping giant, Internet radio is quietly attracting more and more listeners and advertising dollars, leading some experts to predict that some day soon it will eclipse the popularity of satellite radio and iPods.

Already, ratings company Arbitron Inc. says, some 37 million Americans tune into Internet radio at least once a month, up from 11 million four years ago.

With its growing audience, it could start to take a bigger bite of the $11 billion spent annually on online advertising. Nevertheless, But Internet radio faces hurdles, say proponents, because digital copyright laws make it less viable than rivals.

"The growth potential is huge but there are significant challenges. The record industry is doing their best to keep Internet radio in a box," said Jonathan Potter, executive director of the Digital Media Association. Instead, he said, the music producers "should be working on ways to enable it" to capture a paid audience for recording artists.

Potter’s group has been pressing Congress for years to update copyright laws that require Web radio companies to pay royalties to record labels.

But restrictions continue to hinder the growth of the medium. Webcasters can only play four songs by any single artist in a three-hour period and are restricted from promoting the recording of their content, unlike, satellite operators which are free to do so.

"We need to clarify and simplify Internet radio laws to promote the growth of these services," said Potter, whose group represents small and large Webcasters like Time Warner Inc.’s AOL, Yahoo Inc. and RealNetworks.

Potter says most Webcasts are still operated at a loss.

Steve Marks, general counsel of the Recording Industry Association of America, says record companies have embraced Internet radio by offering an easy way to get licenses to use its content.

But he said the trade group was disappointed that some Web radio companies have failed to respect the rights of artists.

"Internet radio companies should stop facilitating piracy and adopt secure streaming formats today," he said.

Still, entrepreneurs have found legitimate ways to overcome the barriers. and are now moving Web radio forward, fueled by views that wireless broadband will turn it into a "killer application." They are set to put it onto cellphones, MP3 players and other devices beginning as soon as late 2005.

"Once Internet radio’s available everywhere and you’ll have ’Internet walkmen’, it will be a watershed moment," said Bryan Miller, general manager for alternative Cincinnati station (www.woxy.com), which aired for 20 years as a traditional radio station before turning Web-only about 9 months ago. Some Web radio operators, like Mercora, an aggregator of 500,000 individual Internet stations, have already found ways around Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) restrictions.

"The DMCA puts a lot of restrictions on the industry. But when you have as much content as we have, these things don’t stop you," said Srivats Sampath, chief executive officer of Mercora, which enables listeners to "timeshift" or record streamed programming so they can play it back later, which is prohibited on U.S. Webcasts.

"DMCA prohibits timeshifting of DMCA webcasts in the U.S., but you can timeshift everything you hear from our Canadian networks, which are registered in Canada where rules don’t prevent listeners from timeshifting," said Mercora.

Other companies are helping Internet operators generate cash for their Webcasts. "We’re good at offering alternative revenue models to advertising for Internet radio stations," said Kurt Huang, co-founder of Bitpass Inc., a Web-based payment service that helps online content providers bundle, promote and sell content and collects payments for them.

Ando Media provides a product called Webcast Metrics, which tracks Web radio usage across 500 independent stations including (www.accuradio.com), (www.airAmericaradio.com) and (www.radioio.com) and then sells that data to advertisers.

"Internet radio represents one of the biggest untapped audiences - daytime primetime," said Jordan Mendell, chief technology officer for Ando, noting that most Web radio listening occurs during the workday at offices.

"It's almost like a puzzle piece. Internet radio fills in the gap between drop-off and the drive home," he said.

Mendell said his company's data has translated into ad buys and has helped stations develop credibility. "We're seeing major ad buyers like Toyota and Napster putting major campaigns on our stations," he said.

Eileen Wolbert, director of advertising for Live365, a portal of 10,000 Web radio stations, also cited a huge upswing in advertising interest this year.

As the medium gains traction, terrestrial broadcasters are embracing it after pulling the plug on streamcasts a few years ago. Viacom Inc's Infinity recently began streaming news/talk outlets and launched a couple of Web-only stations, while Clear Channel Communications Inc recently launched a new Web strategy.

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